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ABSTRACT

This study described teaching methods in use in business studies classes, explored the reasons for their use, and explored perceptions of effectiveness. Four main research methods were used: semistructured interviews; observation of teaching in one class and of presentations of business plans to the panel of experts in the other; perusal of course documents; and informal collection of information by talking to students and teachers. One class studied involved class teaching by the tutor and speakers; the self-study course used multimedia materials backed up by tutor telephone support. Three main dimensions of effectiveness for students were identified: learning about the feasibility of setting up one's own small business; learning about the world of small business; and gaining a sense of purpose in life. Data suggested six subsidiary factors that influenced teaching effectiveness: attendance/commitment; student isolation; tutor isolation; costs/fees; class composition; and evaluation and assessment. (Nine references and two course descriptions are appended.) (YLB)

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PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHODS IN BUSINESS STUDIES

Rosemary Robinson
Nick Arney
Pamela Munn
Carolyn MacDonald

There is increasing attention on the need to encourage greater adult participation in education and training. Little is known, however, about the kinds of teaching methods adults encounter when they do return to study. This report is one of a series of case-studies on the teaching methods used in a range of courses and on perceptions of their effectiveness.

SCRE PROJECT REPORTS

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PREFACE

This case-study of teaching and learning in business studies courses is part of a large research project on teaching and learning in adult education. The aim of the research is to identify teaching methods which adult learners and their tutors perceive as effective across a range of different kinds of courses. We wish to emphasise that the focus of the research is on teaching methods. By reporting adult learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of methods we are able to speculate a little about how adults learn. However, the research was not directed at exploring this. The concern was to describe the teaching methods in use, explore the reasons for their use and explore perceptions of effectiveness. We have little to say about, for example, what the adult learners were bringing to their courses in terms of motivation, previous experience or knowledge.

In due course our final report will draw comparisons across the range of courses studied. However, it was thought that the case-study reports of specific subject areas would be of interest to those working in these areas.

The report is deliberately brief and is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 provides descriptive information about the focus of the research, the particular courses studied and the research methods used. Chapter 2 concentrates on the teaching methods which have been perceived as effective and identifies three main dimensions of effectiveness: learning about the feasibility of setting up one's own small business, learning about the world of small business and gaining a sense of purpose in life. Chapter 3 looks beyond teaching methods to a range of other factors identified by our respondents, as affecting effective teaching. Chapter 4 contains the main findings and a summary. Finally we include, as a series of brief appendices, descriptions of course content and teaching approach.

This report would not have been possible without the help and co-operation of many people. We are particularly grateful to the adult students and their tutors for putting up with us observing their classrooms and for sparing time to be interviewed. Hugh Batten, a visiting scholar from Lincoln School of Health Sciences, La Trobe University, Australia, helped us in interviewing some of the students. We appreciated the time and effort he devoted to this. We are grateful too, to Mavis Gutu who typed the report quickly and accurately. Responsibility for the content rests with the authors and the report does not necessarily represent the views either of SCRE or of the SED who funded the research.

Summary

A brief summary is provided as a handy reference tool and as a guide to the main body of the report. Details of the research design and methods are contained in Chapter 1. It is important to refer to this chapter to understand the claims that can be made about the research. The detailed study of a small number of examples means that we can raise points for consideration by adult educators. We cannot generalise about all business studies courses. In Chapter 4 we summarise our findings.

Teaching Methods	Students felt that teaching was more effective: (1) when there were opportunities to learn from the experience of others - tutors, speakers, business consultants and other students, and (2) when it involved practical activities.	*Chapter 2*
Effectivness of Methods	We report students' and tutors' perceptions of effectiveness. We had no independent measures of effectiveness.	*Chapter 2*
Effectiveness as learning about the feasibility of setting up one's own business	Students felt that practical exercises, particularly market research, were helpful for this aspect. They appreciated receiving individual advice about their business plans. The presentation of case studies and the carrying out of their own market research enabled them to discover whether or not they possessed the right personality for being self-employed.	*Chapter 2*
Effectiveness as learning about the world of small business	The presentation of case-studies by tutors and speakers and on videos gave students a sense of realism about the risks and excitement of setting up a small business. Plenty of opportunities to discuss business ideas and problems with tutors, speakers and other students were also beneficial. Students also liked to be directed to sources of information through individual tuition, speakers or a panel of business people.	*Chapter 2*
Effectiveness as gaining a sense of purpose in life	Students undergoing a period of stress, such as redundancy, found that, by making vocational plans for the future, they had gained a sense of purpose in life.	*Chapter 2*
Attendance/Commitment	Both courses had a high drop-out rate. This was not necessarily due either to a lack of interest or to poor teaching. But as a result of the teaching, several students discovered early on that their business ideas were not feasible or that they had insufficient capital.	*Chapter 3*
Student Isolation	Most students wanted more opportunities to discuss business ideas and problems with other students.	*Chapter 3*

Tutor isolation	Tutors felt isolated if they did not share with other business advisers, the responsibility of encouraging students to set up their own businesses. One tutor wished that the Training Agency provided opportunities for tutors to meet and exchange ideas, and better liaison over matters of finance.	*Chapter 3*
Costs/Fees	Providers felt that it was important that anyone starting up their own business should attend such a course, particularly those people who were hoping to get financial backing. Many students did not complete these courses because their business ideas were not feasible. If students have paid a substantial fee for a correspondence course, perhaps the materials should stimulate further business ideas.	*Chapter 3*
The Composition of the Class	The students had a wide range of educational qualifications, differing backgrounds and a variety of business ideas. Some students, therefore, felt the diversity of their business ideas limited the value of interaction among students. Moreover, the correspondence course materials tended to be too challenging for some students and lacking in depth for others.	*Chapter 3*
Evaluation and Assessment	Both providers attempted to evaluate these courses and to assess students' progress. But it was difficult to get feedback from students about whether they did set up a small business.	*Chapter 3*
What students look for and how this is achieved	A list of methods associated with learning about the feasibility of setting up one's own business, learning about the world of small business and gaining a sense of purpose in life is provided. For instance, through the provision of individual tuition, specific relevant information was provided for each student's business plan. By listening to the tutor's account of her own and others' business experiences, the students learned about the risks and excitement of setting up a small business.	*Chapter 4 Box 1*
Constraints on effectiveness	A list of constraints is provided. For instance, if there were no detailed personalised case-studies presented in the correspondence written materials, the information lacked realism according to some students. If there were too few opportunites to exchange ideas or to share problems with tutors, other students or business people, students felt isolated.	*Chapter 4 Box 2*

We are not able to provide recommendations for adult educators because of the small sample. However, we hoped it would be useful to pose some questions for adult educators to consider in relation to their own work. These questions arise from comments made made by tutors and students about their experience, they are intended to provide a stimulus to discussion on course planning. These questions are repeated at the end of Chapter 4 as part of our conclusions.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR COURSE PLANNERS

Courses A and B

What kind of balance between theory and practice is envisaged?

Do students need to understand general principles of business as well as developing their own ideas? If so, how is time to be allocated remembering that failure to develop a business idea, or a poor business idea, may lead to students dropping out?

How much encouragement should you give to students with good or bad business ideas if the aim is to get students to learn from their own experience?

Course A

Is the Training Agency giving training providers sufficient forewarning for running such courses?

Do opportunities exist for tutors to exchange information with others involved in the teaching of starting-your-own-business courses?

Are there sufficient guidelines/provision for discussion for funding requirements between the Training Agency and the providers?

Is there sufficient time during courses for social mixing among students?

How do you retain morale/interest among students when attendance drops?

Course B

Are the course materials suited to the range of abilities of the students?

Are the course materials relevant to students with diverse business ideas? Would the inclusion of more case-studies be helpful?

Is there sufficient face to face support for the students?

A student has paid a substantial fee for a provider's course and then discovers at an early stage the business plan is not viable. How can the original materials stimulate new ideas?

PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHODS IN BUSINESS STUDIES

1

BACKGROUND

This chapter describes the focus of the research, the two business courses studied, the sample of students and tutors who took part in the research and the research methods used.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

These case- studies of business courses are part of a larger research project on teaching and learning in adult education. The research is studying teaching and learning in Management Studies, 'O' Grade English, Computer Studies and Personal Effectiveness courses as well as Business Studies. The overall aim of the research is to provide a picture of the teaching methods used in these various courses and to report the adult students' perceptions of the effectiveness of these methods.

In the past twenty years or so there has been an increased intensity in the debate about whether distinctions should be drawn between the processes involved in educating children and those involved in educating adults. Knowles (1970) advocated the use of the term 'andragogy' as distinct from pedagogy, to denote the art and science of helping adults learn. He believed the reason adult education had not achieved a greater impact was that 'most teachers of adults have only known how to teach adults as if they were children.' He developed his theory in a number of papers (eg 1972, 1974) and supported by writers such as Mezirow (1981) and Allman (1983) the ideas of a distinctive approach to the teaching of adults have gained ground. Many suggestions have been made about the appropriate teaching methods to be used with adults.

Although many of the authors of these suggestions would not accept the theory of andragogy, they do agree that the 'talk and chalk', or transmission of information by the 'expert' to the 'ignorant' so characteristic of school teaching, is inappropriate for adults. (Chadwick and Legge, 1984; Rogers, 1977; Stephens and Roderick, 1971; Brookfield, 1986).

The focus of the research, however, is not upon the validity of the theory of andragogy. Rather, it is an attempt to explore, in a limited way, through a small number of case-studies the following areas:

- providers' definitions of adult students and the influence of adult students on teaching methods.

- the differences between younger and adult students in terms of study habits, learning methods and motivation among others.

- the advantages and disadvantages of a mixture of younger and older students in the same classes.

- the problems in learning needs adults see themselves as having and the institutional responses to these.

- adult students' perceptions of providers in terms of attitudes towards mature students and in terms of the range of teaching methods used.

- the effectiveness of teaching methods in general and cost-effectiveness in particular.

We did not envisage that each study would provide information on all these areas. Providers who catered only for adults, for instance, might have little to say about mixed classes of younger and older students. Rather, we anticipated that we would comment on all these areas as a result of all the case-studies. This case-study focuses particularly on the effectiveness of teaching methods and through this on the learning need of relating knowledge and skills to practical situations and real-life experience. Interestingly enough a new aspect of what tutors mean by effectiveness was revealed in these courses. This was that students could be discouraged from starting up their own business. These courses, therefore, are so far, a unique example of where failure to complete the course could be counted as a success. We discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3.

THE COURSES

Business Studies courses were chosen as the focus of our case-studies for two main reasons. Firstly, these courses are becoming increasingly prominent in course provision. This is particularly the case for the start-up-your-own-business kind of course and it was this kind of course which was the focus of the research. Secondly, a number of different approaches to providing such courses are on offer and so we were able to select courses of different lengths, with different approaches to teaching and whose fees were rather different. We give more information about each of the courses below.

Course A is run by a private company and is supported by the Training Agency (TA). It is for anyone interested in starting their own small business and is free although students are asked to pay a nominal charge, £5, to cover the cost of tea/coffee and biscuits. It is a short course, lasting four weeks, with two or three meetings each week, each meeting lasting about two and a half hours. Beyond this there is provision for two hours of individual tuition for the students.

There are three main aims of the course:

- understanding of management and of management skills such as costing;
- conveying a sense of the reality of running a small business;
- providing an opportunity for students to discover whether they were suited to being self-employed.

These aims were addressed through teaching by the course tutor and a range of visiting speakers and by students undertaking practical activities such as market research and preparing a

business plan.

The tutor had run the course several times before. She owned a management consultancy under whose auspices the course was run. Her own business experience included working in senior management and marketing for various companies.

There were eight students on the course with widely varying backgrounds and business ideas. Most students were in their late twenties or early thirties although the age range was 28-75. Four students had degrees, some of the others had few formal educational qualifications. Business ideas ranged from running a coffee shop to offering hypnosis. Business plans were at different stages too; one student had already set up an acupuncture practice whilst others had a number of ideas which they wished to develop rather than one idea. There were three men and five women.

Course B is a multi-media distance learning course, the focus again being on starting up your own business. The course study period has an upper limit of nine months although the providers expect students to have completed the course well within that time. The course has been on offer since 1985. The course fee is £385 although students can be sponsored by various outside sources and so cover the cost of the fee. The main aim of the course is to turn a student's business idea into a business plan.

The teaching methods used consisted of the following:

- materials such as books, video and audio cassettes, and workbooks;
- tuition via correspondence and telephone;
- the submission of a business plan to a panel of experts.

The course materials are designed for 50 hours of study and cover such topics as finance, marketing, staff, equipment, suppliers and legal and administrative structures.

There were four students on the course, all male. Two were in senior management and two were serving prison sentences. One female student had registered for the course but subsequently withdrew because of a change in her job circumstances.

We provide a brief summary of the similarities and differences between the two courses below.

	TOPIC	FEE	TEACHING APPROACH	NO. OF STUDENTS
Course A (private provider)	Starting up your own business	Nil but token £5, subsidised by TA	Whole class teaching, individual tuition, practical exercises.	8
Course B (public provider)	Starting up your own business	£385	Multi-media distance learning, panel of experts for business plan (optional).	4

RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLE

There were four main research methods used: semi- structured interviews; observation of teaching in course A, and of presentations of business plans to the panel of experts in course B; perusal of course documents; and informal collection of information by talking to students and teachers at coffee breaks. In course A all interviews were conducted face to face in private and were tape-recorded. In course B, three of the four current students and the course tutor were interviewed face to face; the remaining student and course co-ordinator were interviewed by telephone. We also interviewed three former students on course B, two by telephone and one face to face. A telephone interview was also undertaken with the student who had registered for the course, but subsequently withdrawn, to discover her reasons for doing so. Telephone interviews were conducted with those who lived in those far flung parts of Scotland which made face to face interviewing impractical. Table 1.1 describes the sample achieved.

Table 1.1: Sample achieved

	Tutor	Co-ordinator	Student
Course A	1	1	8
Course B	1	1	4 current 3 former 1 drop-out
TOTALS	2	2	16

Observation of course A and of the panel of experts' meetings in course B was non-participant and loosely structured. It involved noting the teachers' and students' activities and noting changes in activity. There were two main purposes to the observation; firstly, to gather data on 'classroom' activities; and, secondly, to help inform interviews. We felt that we would have a better understanding of comments on teaching methods and on the experience of presenting a business plan to a panel of experts if we saw them in action.

The data were content analysed deriving categories from our research questions. We progressively identified new categories from the data, making strenuous attempts to ensure that the data were being interpreted according to the same rules. In reporting these data we have looked for patterns in perceptions of the effectiveness of teaching methods. However, given the semi-structured nature of our approach, we have sought to present distinctive perceptions and to report areas which we did not anticipate in designing the research. The most obvious of these are the problems posed by learning in prison.

CLAIMS ABOUT THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

What can we claim on the basis of the data collected from these two courses? Clearly the courses do not provide a statistical basis for generalising to teaching and learning in all business studies courses. Nor do these case-studies provide us with detailed information about the thoughts and feelings of students and teachers. We have very little to say about the culture in which concerns about teaching methods are embedded. What we can claim is that we have found patterns of response about the perceived effectiveness of teaching methods. We hope that in describing these perceptions, those engaged in start-up-your-own business courses will consider whether they strike chords with their own experience. Are the comments made by the students and their teachers familiar? If so, are there possibilities for extending and developing the teaching methods used? In other words, we hope this study will provoke discussion and reflection on the teaching methods being used, their rationale and effectiveness.

2

TEACHING METHODS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter concentrates on the teaching methods used in the two courses and on how effective the methods were in the opinion of students and tutors. It is important to stress that we have no independent measures of effectiveness. Indeed we had a fairly broad view of what 'effectiveness' might mean. Methods might be effective in the sense of helping the students acquire the knowledge and skills intended by the tutor. They might be effective in encouraging adults to attend other courses, or in any number of other ways. Our questions of effectiveness were deliberately phrased to allow our respondents to talk about effectiveness in the ways most appropriate to them. We return to the question of effectiveness later in this chapter. First, we describe the teaching methods used.

THE TEACHING METHODS

At the start of both courses, the students were expected to come with an idea for setting up their own small business and this was to be developed into a business plan during the running of the course. Table 2.1 overleaf lists the various methods used for achieving this aim on the two courses; it shows that a variety of teaching approaches was used on both courses. Not surprisingly, as one course was intended for home study while the other was designed for face to face teaching, methods were rather different. However, the courses had some methods in common; these were the provision of individual practical activities and the use of pamphlets.

The main method for teaching students on the short course was through whole-class teaching by the tutor and by the visiting speakers. The tutor gave short talks to the students, lasting about five to ten minutes and backed up by the use of brief handouts and of a white-board. She related business theoretical themes to her own business experiences, to local businesses and to the students' individual business ideas. Her talk was interspersed with questions for the students or with requests for them to volunteer their opinions or information. Her manner, at least as far as the researcher was concerned, was humorous, lively, friendly and enthusiastic; her speech was quick and lacking in business jargon. The teaching of the speakers was similar. Before any of them had spoken for any length of time, the tutor would interrupt with a question, a comment, or a wish for a certain point to be expanded. Soon the students too were asking questions or joining in the discussion. So these sessions were conducted in an interactive, responsive style; brief ten minute talks/counselling/ discussions rather than lectures were provided. Every session, the students would be involved in various activities, for instance, asking questions, contributing information, designing their market

research questionnaires, reading these to the class for comments and ideas and, subsequently, reporting back their findings from this research. (A further description of this course is provided in Appendix A).

Table 2.1: Teaching methods used

SHORT COURSE A	DISTANCE LEARNING COURSE B
Brief talks	-
Whole class discussion	-
Handouts/pamphlets	Handouts/pamphlets
-	Manuals/books
-	Four workbooks
-	One video tape
-	Four audio-cassettes
Five speakers	-
Individual activities	Individual activities including exercises
Face to face individual tuition for one hour on two occasions with the tutor	-
-	Telephone tuition for four hours per student with the tutor
-	Presentation of business plan to panel of business people
Social activity	-

On the distance learning course, the main method employed was self-study. At the start of this course, the tutor planned out on the telephone with each student a timetable for developing her/his business idea into a business plan. This timetable could extend from between two and nine months, depending on factors such as the complexity of the student's business idea or whether or not the student was already running a business. For home study purposes, the student was sent a video tape, audio-cassette tapes, workbooks, three set books and some leaflets. The workbooks indicated to the student when to use the video tape and audio-cassettes and when to carry out certain activities and exercises. The answers to the latter were sent to the tutor for comments. The students used this written work as a draft for a final business plan. Throughout the course, the students were able to telephone their tutor for advice. After completing the course, the students could ask for a meeting, which lasts for an hour, with a panel of three business people for an assessment of their business plans. This assignment was not given a mark; the student did not pass or fail but was sent a course completion certificate and the panel's comments. (A further description of this course is provided in Appendix B)

We have presented a description of the main teaching methods used on the two courses: the class teaching by the tutor and speakers on the short course; and the self-study using multi-media materials backed up by tutor telephone support on the correspondence course. We now turn to the

question of how effective the teaching methods were. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, we have no independent measures on the effectiveness of various teaching methods. We are reporting the students' and the tutors' perceptions of effectiveness. We also indicated earlier that we had no preconceived notion of what effectiveness might mean. It could range from learning what was intended, to harder to measure effects, such as enjoyment or enhanced self-esteem. Our data from the students and tutors in these two business studies courses suggest three main dimensions of effectiveness. These are: learning about the feasibility of setting up one's own business; learning about the world of small business; and the gaining of a sense of purpose in life.

EFFECTIVENESS AS LEARNING ABOUT THE FEASIBILITY OF SETTING UP ONE'S OWN BUSINESS

This aspect of the effectiveness of the teaching methods involved practical exercises, such as working out the costing for equipment or for premises and market research to test out the demand for the produce or service being offered. More than this, however, through individual tuition and the development of a business plan, students came to realise more fully what was involved in setting up their own business. Issues such as financial risks, the hours of work needed and potential impact on the family were all considered. In some cases, this testing out of the feasibility of the whole idea of setting up in business fired people with enthusiasm and they went on to do just that. In other cases people were put off. In either event, the tutors in both courses saw this as effective. By the end of the course or earlier, most of the students perceived setting up a small business as being more difficult than they had previously thought or as not being feasible for their particular business ideas. This was how some of them expressed the effectiveness of this learning:

> Well, I wouldn't say that it's enabled me to zoom off and set up my own business straight away but it does give you a good idea of what sort of things you have to do before you can set up a business. It really just touches the tip of the iceberg really. I think anybody who is going to do it, take the plunge and go ahead and set up their own business, then they'd need to investigate to a greater depth, possibly take more courses.

> I was looking at areas of business that could be exploited I suppose. I did basic market research, feasibility study on setting up my own particular business in - (town). I came to the conclusion the whole thing was just too expensive!

> I have helped show myself that setting up a business is more difficult than I believed - not in terms of perhaps getting the work from the clients, nor even doing the work but actually the financial side would be less rewarding than I had anticipated. And that was a big disappointment to me ... I'm probably going to have to fine-tune my ideas a bit more and think of additional things to do. There are two ways that I can go with it, I can either start up my own business which is still in the planning or I can form a new part of our company as it stands, which is much easier and less risky.

The co-ordinator for the distance learning course considered that this type of discovery by the students was worthwhile even if it meant that students did not complete the course as a result:

> In these cases the course can be considered successful in that it has prevented these trainees from making a serious mistake.

The tutor on the short course was concerned that some students had not gained this insight and were intent on rushing off to set up a small business:

> Some delegates have no idea, no understanding what self-employment is like - frightening - they want to launch off into schemes - they disregard the reality of the situation in a frightening kind of way. Should we try and follow up on people like that. Did they actually go ahead and what happened?

She indicated that there are certain aspects of setting up a small business which cannot be taught on a course. For instance, a tutor can show a student how to work out a cash flow chart for a restaurant business but she/he cannot teach a student how to get the necessary finance without taking risks. She felt that several students had self-confidence and a possible business plan but were unable to get the necessary financial backing without putting their families into a high risk situation:

> Some delegates are very strong on their personal skills and don't need a lot of confidence building. I think the risk taking side - to jump into self-employment - very different. Some of them are very confident themselves as people - especially I think of a delegate, a trained instructor in gymnastics, wanted to set up his own leisure club - very strong on own background, and a strong belief in himself but a bit hesitant and in his case, worried about the finance - looking for partnership - but not wanting someone owning him as he put it.

The tutor said that other students, though, had discovered, through doing their market research, that they did not have the right personal qualities for setting up a small business. None of the students in our sample made this discovery about themselves though a few felt apprehensive about doing their market research. One student considered that such courses tended to attract a self-assertive type of student anyhow.

As mentioned above, part of the process of testing the feasibility of setting up a business was through practical activities. The most effective of these in terms of testing the feasibility of the business idea was perceived to be the market research exercises. Both courses employed this method. The type of market research depended on the nature of the students' business ideas. For some students, the most appropriate approach initially was to ask people in the street to answer a questionnaire. Other students telephoned various possible clients or sought out statistical information, such as the number or whereabouts of existing businesses which were offering the same product

or service as they themselves intended to provide. Several students discovered that this practical exercise was very effective for their learning; this was how one student described the benefits from this learning for the running of her present small business:

> Most interesting and enhancing part of the course for me was the market research. I got a lot of ideas, not only from my questionnaire, I began to get more insight into how I ought to present myself, pricing, type of premises, type of people I need to attract and also from the others' (students') presentations. More practical, applicable than the previous course (I attended).

The tutor on the short course emphasised the effectiveness of such practical experiences:

> Our first delegates were not pushed into doing market research in the same way - we now make it a really strong requirement because we've discovered how effective it is. It shows people their liabilities instead of just being told the theory.

Both tutors considered the practical elements in the courses were of more importance to the students' learning than the theoretical aspects. Though general business knowledge was a feature of both courses, the emphasis was on the application of this to the student's individual circumstances. This individualised approach to learning was highly valued by the students. One student commented favourably on the specificity of the tutor's approach in her teaching in the short course:

> She was really tuned into what each individual was doing. She was totally tuned into each person's business idea. Not things in general, not generalisation.

The following comments show that the students considered individual tuition was both helpful and essential because of the specificity of the needs of this diverse group of students:

> I found it essential because I had gone with a fairly wishy washy idea about what it was I was going to look at. I only set out in a way to investigate how my profession might be privatised - to pick out something out of that to do market research on was quite difficult and talking it all out with X (the tutor) was the best way of sifting out one or two angles that I could aim for.

> It was quite helpful because the delegates were all trying to do such different things, difficult to find a common denominator.

On the distance learning course there was the opportunity of individual tuition both via telephone contact with the tutor and the presentation of a business plan to the panel of business people. Here, students had the opportunity to go over in detail matters directly related to their own business plan. For the students who made use of these opportunities they were seen as valuable, as illustrated below:

> The telephone has been a great help to me. If there was something I came across that I couldn't understand or I couldn't decipher, I could 'phone the tutor.
>
> I think it (the panel of business people) is essential - it is the key part of the course. I think to have the necessary confidence in the business plan, it's an important part of the course.

However, relatively small numbers made use of the panel of business people and we return to this in Chapter 3.

So far we have stressed the perceptions of effectiveness in terms of students learning about the feasibility of setting up their own small business through a series of practical activities and individual tuition relating to their own business plan. However, the students also welcomed opportunities to hear about the experiences of others, and, as we shall see in Chapter 3, would have welcomed more opportunities to do so.

EFFECTIVENESS AS LEARNING ABOUT THE WORLD OF SMALL BUSINESS

The tutors on both courses stressed the importance of students getting a feel of what it was actually like to run one's own business. The short course exposed students to a range of people who had set up small businesses and the tutor used her own experience to illustrate theory and practice. The tutor on the distance learning course saw her role as that of business adviser and saw the course as practically orientated where her experience in the business world was 'on tap' for the students. Students also had the opportunity to learn from the experience of those on video and from the business panel. The overwhelming view from students on both courses was that the opportunity to hear about others' experiences in setting up and running a small business was highly valued. A brief selection from the interviews makes this point:

> Hearing other people saying and discussing how they'd set up their own business, the problems they'd met and resolved. They were more helpful than anything else really because you're hearing straight from the horse's mouth so to speak.
>
> The video was good because it was inspirational - had the message, 'It was not easy' - brought that point out quite well - very realistic ... It puts you into the picture right away - when you see something visual, you can assess yourself in comparison I suppose - in combination with the tapes that's very good.
>
> At the end you have to get a business plan. But you don't know whether it would work until you'd put it into practice so this panel of experts will sit and criticise it so as you'll be able to tell where your mistakes are, they'll help you.

As well as learning from outsiders, the students valued the opportunity to learn from each other. One student on the short course described the benefits derived from learning from other students' experiences:

> I certainly find in my job I'm on my own a lot of the time - having other people to bounce ideas off on any courses I go on, I find that one of the nicest things about being in a group where everybody's there to learn something or has some experience to bring to the course. The toing and froing between people is just very useful.

Her tutor likewise perceived the students' diversity of experience and of personal characteristics as being helpful for students' learning. She considered that some students' keenness for setting up a small business enthused other students, that some students had plenty of entrepreneurial ideas and that other students were good at solving problems:

> It (the diversity) allows delegates to help each other. You don't want a uniform group. (They) help each other more when they are different. They discuss things together. Some people have got a lot of experience to offer others, very keen, others, ideas; help each other along. Some groups are more successful than others - the chemistry of a group can just catch on.

In the short course, the tutor encouraged students to share ideas for the design and analysis of their market research questionnaires. The tutor also arranged a follow-up party for all the students who had attended courses during the previous six months. She felt that this gave her a chance to see how students' business ideas had advanced and it gave the students an opportunity to exchange ideas and to promote their own small business. Three of the students from our sample went to one of these parties; one thought that the party had provided an opportunity for learning from other students and for sharing experiences which he had not really had time for during the course. As the party was well attended and the talk amongst the students who were present, seemed to be predominately about running small business, one can perhaps assume that the students perceived such an event to be helpful towards stimulating business ideas. One student had provided some of the party fare from his own small catering business.

At one session on the short course, the students were given the opportunity to meet two people who had successfully set up their own business and also to see the products which they made, hired and sold to customers. One student suggested that a useful addition to the course would be a visit to the premises of a small business:

> It may or may not have been appropriate for the course, but I would have liked to actually go out and see someone's business. Actually see the circumstances in which somebody works. ... Most of the conferences I go on are field trip orientated - we have to go and see places - this does put reality into the picture quite well.

The distance learning course had no opportunities for students to meet each other and this was seen as a failing by both tutors and students. The course organisers hoped to remedy this in the future.

EFFECTIVENESS - GAINING A SENSE OF PURPOSE IN LIFE

This third dimension, unlike the previous two, was applicable to only a minority of students. Three students perceived that the distance learning course had helped to give a sense of purpose, a structure to their lives. These were students undergoing stressful situations; two were in prison and one had been made redundant and was unemployed. They commented on this aspect of their learning:

> I aim to help myself rather than smash up cells and such like stuff. Self-satisfaction - I've started something (the course) and I've finished it.

> It's getting my mind on constructive things - keep you off drugs. In here some people - their idea is to get back out there and have another go. I'm in here marking out different companies, manufacturers ... Getting my mind in the right frame.

> I was unemployed for six months, and in that period of time you lose a lot of grip. A lot of grip goes out of your thinking, and when I was redundant, I simply had to apply myself to something, and this (the course) was grist to the mill.

The tutor, though, pointed out that, for students in prison, it was difficult to retain this sense of purpose as they frequently had several years of their sentences to complete before they could put any business plans into action. She indicated too that this course particularly attracted such people as they perceived setting up and running a small business as the only way open to them for restructuring their vocational life. She said:

> It tends to be a course that people in prison do. Again, I suppose the reason for that is if they do come out into the world, they are going to find it very difficult to get a job and therefore this is a way to do it. Certainly the ones I have dealt with find it difficult because it isn't going to happen now (starting up a business), it's in five or ten years time.

This dimension of effectiveness might have come about by these students participating on any course with a similar content and so it might not necessarily be related to the particular teaching methods used on this course. On the other hand, perhaps the carrying out of activities at certain times or the attitude of their tutor may have helped to instil this feeling. For some of our subsequent case-studies, tutors and similarly unemployed students have perceived this need for gaining a sense of purpose or structure in their life as being a relevant part of their participation on a course. Their tutors endeavoured to foster this feeling by encouraging regular attendance, punctuality and the right attitudes to learning. This, besides the learning of the actual content of the course, was seen by both tutors and students as being helpful towards gaining an overall vocational aim which was getting such students back into employment.

This feeling of gaining a sense of purpose was not expressed by any of the students on the short course; perhaps this was because the majority of them were in employment and so they were already leading fairly structured lives.

SUMMARY

This chapter has been concerned with the teaching methods used on the two start-up-your-own business courses and perceptions of the effectiveness of these methods. We were able to observe the teaching methods used for the majority of course A. For the distance learning course B, we were able to observe only a small part of the methods used, the teaching by the panel of business people. On the short course, the students liked the tutor's and speakers' use of brief clear talks for describing their business experiences and business theories. They felt their active participation, for instance, in carrying out market research as homework and in volunteering information, had helped their learning. The distance learners considered that the tutor's telephone support, her written comments and the meeting with the panel of business experts were the most helpful elements of the course for their learning. The students talked about effectiveness in terms of learning about the feasibility of setting up one's own business, learning about the world of small business and the gaining of a sense of purpose in life. If a major factor affecting teaching effectiveness is the methods used, then our data suggest that there are subsidiary factors too. We consider these in Chapter 3.

3

FACTORS AFFECTING EFFECTIVE TEACHING

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we try to identify some of the factors constraining the effective teaching described by the students in Chapter 2. In that chapter, we indicated the methods of teaching which the tutors and students identified as being effective. The students found practical activities, such as market research and cash flow calculations and an interactive teaching relationship, either in a face to face situation or on the telephone particularly helpful. Thus the students felt that teaching was most effective when:

i) there were opportunities to learn from the experience of others - tutors, speakers, members of the panel, other students .
ii) it was applied to the students' individual circumstances.
iii) it involved practical activities.

Through this teaching, the students felt that they had achieved a sense of realism which had sometimes left them disappointed in that some of them had been deterred from their original aim, setting up a small business. If we think of the teaching methods used as a major factor affecting the effectiveness of the teaching, are there subsidiary factors which influence teaching effectiveness? Our data suggest at least six subsidiary factors:

- attendance/commitment
- student isolation
- tutor isolation
- costs/fees
- the composition of the class
- evaluation and assessment

ATTENDANCE/COMMITMENT

Both courses had a high drop-out rate of students. Two out of the eight students attended the last session of the short course, and in the distance learning course, just over three percent of students nationally have completed the course since its commencement in 1985. If students are not attending or completing a course, obviously no teaching, 'effective' or 'ineffective' can take place. But drop-out from these courses is somewhat different from drop-out on other adult courses - it is not necessarily due to either a lack of interest or to poor teaching. As a result of the teaching, several students discovered early on in these courses that their business ideas were not feasible or that they had no means of raising the necessary capital. As the major part of these courses revolved round the design of the students' individual business plan, not surprisingly, such students felt that there

was little point in their continuing or completing the course. For instance, one student on the short course, attended the last session but had not taken up the offer of individual tuition as he felt that was pointless until his market research showed him that he had found a feasible business idea; he had needed to discard his original idea.

As one student pointed out, these start-up-your-own business courses are very dependent on what the student her/himself rather than the tutor can put into it; that is a feasible business idea, suitable personal qualities and usually some financial backing. This last factor is hardly teachable; tutors and the panel can only direct students towards various sources of finance or grants. Interestingly, the two students who completed the distance learning course both had some financial support for their business ideas. The knowledge that they had this support could perhaps have been a factor in their completing the whole course. Students can be advised as to how to improve a business plan but here again there are certain constraints. Most business ideas are closely related to the students' own skills, interests and past experiences, so such ideas cannot necessarily be radically altered.

Poor attendance, though, creates problems for tutors and for those students who still wish to continue a course. It was difficult for the tutor on the short course to keep the momentum going during the last session when only two students turned up. The students appreciated this but nevertheless, felt that a course should continue to be run effectively until its completion. These two students commented:

> What I was disappointed in, was that it petered out towards the end - to some extent because other participants on the course were unable to come or whatever. But also she didn't make much use of the last day - in a way things had given up by then and I was disappointed because on every other occasion I've got so much from each meeting and had gone back continually inspired - that was disappointing. ... A pity - a bad note to finish on.

> Today was like a damp squib, not satisfactory. We were not told about any follow up courses unless we are going to be hearing from her. She did say we could attend some other free courses but she didn't say which. It was not wrapped up properly. Endings are very important - endings are really the beginning of something else. ... But poor attendance is demoralising - they (the other students) missed the finals - to some nuts and bolts of the business - seems odd not to come - potentially suicidal. ... People not paying - that's why attendance is poor.

One student felt that the attendance was poor because students had not been required to pay fees. However, the drop-out rate for the other course, for which students had paid several hundreds of pounds, was also high.

STUDENT ISOLATION

Most of the students had expressed a need for more contact with other people during the course - either with the tutor, other students or local business experts in order to discuss their business ideas and problems. Was this feeling of isolation perhaps exacerbated by the particular nature of these start up your own business courses? For instance, factors such as:

- the necessity for good business ideas
- the worry of financial risks
- the disparity of business ideas
- the competitive atmosphere

could all contribute to feelings of isolation. Our evidence reveals a contradictory picture, most students did feel a sense of isolation as we shall see. However, a few recognised this as inevitable and to some extent welcomed it.

The distance learners were even more isolated than those on the short course in that they had no face to face contact with other students nor with their tutor. The provider of the course is aware of this need and is considering including a residential weekend in the course. But this would still not be helpful for those students serving a prison sentence. Two distance learners commented:

> I'd have preferred if there'd been a teacher - maybe twice, three times during the course.

> I find that I'm changing it (the business plan) quite a lot and that a shorter feedback time might be useful. I'd have probably benefited from going to see someone every week - when I trundled along with the current state of play and said 'This is the current state of play, am I doing the right thing?'

The tutor, likewise felt that some students needed face to face tuition during the course but she pointed out that this would be difficult because of the wide geographical spread of the students.

In the short course, several students felt that they had not been given enough time to get to know each other and so benefit from an exchange of ideas and of previous experience. Two commented:

> I went on the course because my interest in my small business was lagging. I had hoped for a greater exchange of ideas from other students. When everyone is business-orientated, you can feed off each other.

> We went for a drink afterwards - we shared ideas. I was encouraged - people in the same position - worries about the same things - not so isolated. I benefited from that but you had to do this for yourself - the tutor didn't arrange it.

One student thought proper coffee breaks in the middle of sessions might have given students more time to exchange ideas and experiences. At the first session, the tutor allowed the students time for a complete break for coffee; some of them left the room and stood chatting about their ideas and plans for running a small business. But at most subsequent sessions, the students quickly helped themselves, returned to their seats and the tutor continued the course. As students often arrived late for sessions, perhaps the tutor felt there was not enough time during such a short course for complete breaks. One student said:

> We didn't actually have time to get to know each other. If there had been longer coffee breaks, I think that could have developed. Because if you were in the room, X. (the tutor) was still talking about the course orientated things. Now having ended the course, I know very little about any of the other people.

Another student felt that the shortness of the course and the seating arrangement in the room had not encouraged the development of friendly relationships:

> (This course was) a rush! In the previous course, we built up relationships in class - here there was no table to write at - if there had been a classroom table or a long conference table, we'd have felt more together.

Nevertheless, one student considered that, though it was interesting to meet the other students on the short course, it was really not feasible to learn much from each others' past experiences because everyones' business ideas were all so different:

> They (the students) were so different - what applied to one, didn't necessarily apply to others. It was interesting to meet all the people and hear what they wanted to do but because they were such a diverse mixture, it was kind of difficult to find a common thread. For example, someone setting up a business in hypnotism is so different from someone trying to set up a coffee shop!

Two students though were not in favour of exchanging ideas with the others or working as a group because of fears that someone might pinch their business ideas or that their employers might find out that they were taking the course. One of these students considered that for these reasons and because students' business plans were so specific, tuition should be on an individual basis:

> They'd have to be one-to-one because of confidentiality, the specific nature of it. I'd be very unhappy with other people - unless some sort of agreement - the awareness 'pinch your idea' - your employment can be jeopardised.

TUTOR ISOLATION

The tutor on course A wondered how far she should encourage students to go ahead with their business ideas. She felt that offering such advice was a heavy responsibility bearing in mind the

financial risks involved and wanted to hear about other tutors' approach to this area. She wished that there were more opportunities arranged by the Training Agency for meetings with other tutors for discussing this issue and for exchanging ideas on effective methods of teaching. The tutor on course B did not raise this issue but then she was sharing this responsibility of deciding how much encouragement to give students with members of the business panel. The course A tutor said:

> Am I too cautious? Should we push them more into self-employment? I'm very cautious - I'm very worried about what could happen. But I'm interested in what the other teachers do - do they promote it more? I'd like to talk about this problem with other training providers. I feel we've a great responsibility - if I said to somebody, this is a brilliant idea, go ahead and they do it and the thing collapses! I get angry with business councils that do that, push, push, push.

The tutor also felt that there was some lack of liaison over matters of finance between the Training Agency and her company. In the past, she had been given very little time in which to organise the running of these courses as the Training Agency tended not to commit itself to a yearly contract. But at least her firm was now receiving a six month contract for running a series of courses. Funding for resources too seemed somewhat haphazard - the provision of speakers was not a normal part of the course but when she asked if it were possible to have any, the Training Agency responded by asking why she had not made this request before.

COSTS/FEES

The co-ordinator for course A thought it was important that anyone starting up their own business should attend such a course and particularly those people who were hoping to get financial backing:

> People are interested in setting up their own business, therefore training should be one of the crucial aspects these people go through. Enterprise Allowance gives money but people should do a course before getting money to set up a business. ... There are lots of these courses - public and private - lots freely available.

As we have pointed out earlier, students frequently gave up these courses at an early stage for a perfectly valid reason; they no longer wished, at the present at least, to set up their own business. For course A, there was little financial loss incurred - students had only paid £5 towards refreshments. But for course B, students had paid quite high fees and it was not possible for them to receive any type of rebate if, at any time, they no longer wished to continue the course. Such students may feel fairly disgruntled even though they may realise that by being put off setting up their own business, they have not been involved in serious financial losses. One student felt quite bitter when he realised, after paying for the course, that firstly, there were plenty of similar courses available free, and, secondly, in his view, the course materials were of a poor standard. Another student, who held a

similar opinion about the materials, considered that most of the fees probably went towards payment of the panel. But, as we have already pointed out, very few students reached the stage of producing their own business plan for such a meeting.

Perhaps the students themselves suggested a possible solution; several wished that the course could have been designed so that it could have been credited towards a diploma or degree. This would possibly encourage more students to continue the course and even if a student had not found a feasible business idea, s/he would at least have gained something in return for the high fee. On the other hand, perhaps this approach would make the course requirements of too high a standard for some students.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE CLASS

On these courses, the students had a wide range of educational qualifications, differing backgrounds and a variety of business ideas. We have already indicated that some students on the short course wished that there had been more opportunities to learn from each other but that this might be difficult to achieve because of the wide diversity of their business ideas. The same problem would surface probably on the distance learning course if those students were gathered together for face to face tutorials. Moreover some of those felt that the course materials had not suited their diversity of ideas. This meant that they tended to gain too much general information and too little information which they could see as applicable to their particular needs. This was how one student perceived this shortcoming and how he felt that the insertion of more case-studies might have remedied somewhat this aspect of the course:

> Another problem of the course, the generalised aspect of it - not only is it looking at generalised business but it is also looking at the generalised person and to a large extent, it may be geared to people who've been made redundant - who are in the 40-50 bracket where they've been in some sort of middle management post.
>
> They should give you a full business plan for a manufacturing company, a trading company and a services company - even if they are imaginary - they could be invented. They should certainly have those in the material. I think I'd have benefited from that and associated with that, a history of the first three years of the business. ... I think the lack of case-study material is the biggest failing.

Several of the students on the distance learning course expressed some dissatisfaction with the written materials; the more able students felt that the materials were lacking in the depth and in the detail which they had expected from such providing institutions whilst the students with less formal educational backgrounds found the materials were incomprehensible in places. To design a correspondence course to suit the diverse abilities of students is undoubtedly difficult. Nevertheless, the course materials are inevitably the main means of retaining a student's interest on such courses.

It is, therefore, obviously important that the materials for students who are learning on their own should be sufficiently stimulating for the able students and yet not too complex for the least able.

Neither of these two students seemed to have felt that the materials were pitched at the correct level for their needs:

> I was quite disappointed by the scope of the material - I felt there was too little material ... I felt that the accounting side and business factors like liquidation and such like weren't discussed in enough detail to make them interesting so there was insufficient background to really appreciate their significance and as a result, you couldn't generate any interest in it.
>
> Some parts a bit baffling.

Fortunately the first of these students felt that the tutor and the panel had helped to eradicate some of the failings which he perceived in the materials:

> More support could have come through the course material. I felt that the course material itself was sadly lacking. I felt that my tutor was particularly helpful. But she was particularly helpful because the course materials hadn't pointed out things that they should have. Similarly the panel pointed out things that weren't covered by the course material.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

For our management case-studies, we considered that there was not sufficient attempt at either assessing the students' performances or at evaluating the courses. This was not so evident with these two business studies courses. Efforts were made to carry out both these procedures. For instance, the organisers of the correspondence course request their students to write answers to activities and exercises on to a carbonised pad and then to send the three copies to the tutor for comments. The tutor returned one copy to the students with written comments, retained one and sent the third to the organiser. This enabled the latter to get continuous feedback on a student's progress. A student serving a prison sentence was unable to obtain permission to attend a meeting of the panel of business people so the organisers arranged for a special meeting of the panel to be held in the prison in order that this student could have his business plan assessed.

Nevertheless some problems over evaluation and assessment were encountered. Tutor A was requested by the Training Agency to give an assessment of a student's likelihood of setting up a small business; this she considered difficult to do because of the uncertainties of the business world. She was particularly concerned about what happened to those of her students whom she perceived as not having a feasible business idea. She said that she had no means of finding out whether or not these students tried to go ahead with their ideas. The follow-up party gave her an opportunity to informally

find out how some students' ideas had progressed. The organisers of course B had held a review but only sixty-one out of the 300 students who had been sent questionnaires responded; eight of these students said that they were successfully running a small business. This difficulty in obtaining feedback from students in both of the courses means that the tutors have little information on which to assess the effectiveness of their teaching - that is, had they really prevented the students with poor ideas from setting up their own businesses? Had they given sufficient information to those who had gone ahead and started their own business?

SUMMARY

In this chapter we have described the way in which a range of factors impinge on teaching effectiveness. These are the high drop-out rate of students which is not necessarily due to either a lack of interest or to poor teaching; the wish expressed by several students for more contact with other people during the course; the lack of opportunities for one tutor to exchange ideas with other tutors and the need for better liaison between the Training Agency and tutors; the issue of fees and students no longer wishing to continue a course; the wide range of educational qualifications, differing backgrounds and variety of business ideas amongst the students which produces problems for 'class' teaching and for the design of course materials; and the difficulties of assessing such students.

In the concluding chapter we try to draw together the key points from our case-studies and discuss their implications for teaching.

4

CONCLUSION

In this final chapter we consider what our research on these start-up-your-own business courses have to tell us about adult education in general and teaching methods in particular. Firstly, we provide summary answers to various aspects of the research described in chapter one. Secondly, we provide tables encapsulating the central elements of our findings on teaching methods.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS: SOME ANSWERS

Looking back to the original focus of the research, what have these business study courses got to tell us?

- *providers' definitions of adult students and the influence of adult students on teaching methods.*

The courses were intended for students aged eighteen and upwards. The tutors perceived the adults' past experiences and skills as being a basis on which to plan a successful small business. Therefore, throughout the courses, students' previous work experiences or interests were related to the requirements of their business plans.

- *the differences between younger and adult students in terms of study habits, learning methods and motivation among others.*

The tutor on the distance learning course considered that more mature adults were more easily taught business studies subjects than younger adults because they had had a longer experience of life. She did not know whether or not this would be applicable to other subjects. But she considered that newly graduated students were less responsive and tended to expect to be provided with answers. Most of the students on this course were aged twenty-five and upwards. The tutor on the short course did not mention any differences between young and adult students.

- *the advantages and disadvantages of a mixture of younger and older students in the same class.*

The students on the distance learning course were taught on an individual basis at their own pace so there was nothing in the data applicable to this. The tutor on the short course perceived the mixture of younger and older students as being entirely beneficial for learning in that students in a less uniform group could help each other - some providing previous experience, others ideas and others, enthusiasm. She did not indicate that certain age groups would tend to have more of any of

these qualities but presumably she perceived the older ones as having the most experience. The students enjoyed the mixed composition of the class.

- *the problems in learning needs adults see themselves as having and the institutional responses to these.*

All the students felt that they needed people experienced in business to assist them in the development of their business plans. There was provision for this on both courses - tutors, speakers and panel members. Several students would have liked more opportunities for exchanging ideas/ problem solving with other students or with the tutor. The provider of the distance learning course was aware of this learning need and hoped to make provision for face to face tutor tuition during the course and for students to meet each other. The organiser of the short course said students always seemed to want more speakers but she considered the present provision was adequate on such a short course. None of the students whom we interviewed, expressed a wish for more speakers to take part in the course but several wished that there had been more opportunities during the course for discussion amongst themselves. The provider does organise follow-up parties for students to meet again. The students felt that individualised learning was necessary as all their business ideas were so different. This type of learning was available on both courses through the provision of face to face tuition. Some of the distance learners felt that they needed detailed in depth written course materials with which they could be stimulated and to which they could relate their own business ideas.

- *adult students' perceptions of providers in terms of attitudes towards mature students and in terms of the range of teaching methods used.*

Some students chose the distance learning course because they wished to study at home or because they were in prison and this course seemed to be the only one in this subject available to them. Several students picked the particular provider of this course because they considered the materials would be of a high standard - some students based this judgment on the materials produced for other courses by this provider. The students on the short course chose it for reasons of length, geographical position, attractive advertising or timing, rather than from the viewpoint of teaching methods.

- *the effectiveness of teaching methods in general and cost-effectiveness in particular.*

We have identified three dimensions of effectiveness as perceived by the tutors and their students: learning about the feasibility of setting up your own small business, learning about the world of small business and the gaining of a sense of purpose. We pointed out that it was difficult for tutors to assess students' future performance after taking such courses because of the volatile nature of the business world and the need for some students to find a source of financial backing before being able to go ahead with setting up a business of their own.

The providers of the distance learning course had held a review of the course because it was attracting too few students and because so many students were not completing the course. They had not realised when they first produced the material for this course, that shortly there would be so many other start-up-your-own business courses on the market which would be free for students. To improve the present course for students, they were intending to provide some form of face to face support during the course. The cost for this was to be covered by cutting down on administrative costs by having fewer starting dates per year for students.

As we have pointed out, some students paid their fees and then during the course discovered their business idea was not feasible and so did not complete the course. The providers felt that this was cost-effective from the student's point of view in that he/she had perhaps been prevented from making a serious financial mistake. But we wondered if the students perceived this cost-effectiveness in the same way. The provider for the short course considered that it was good to have such courses freely available for students as it was so important for people to have this training before setting up business. Some of the students admitted that they could not have afforded to pay fees. Others said that they were attracted to the course partly because of the lack of costs.

Our overall impression from these start-up-your-own business courses is that most students gained from attending even though for many, their original aim, that of setting up their own business, had turned out to be - for the moment at least - not obtainable or more problematic than they had realised at first. Some of the gains mentioned by several students were:

- some understanding of business theory
- a feeling of what running a small business would be like - the excitement and independence as well as the hard work and risks
- the whereabouts of sources of help/information for grants, VAT etc
- the experience of preparing and then presenting a business plan to business people
- ideas/market research to carry out in the future

Interestingly, none of the students we interviewed had been completely put off the idea of running a small business; they perceived it as being difficult but they still had not completely discarded it from their vocational plans. They all seemed to have future ideas for attending more business or management type courses or of doing more market research or thinking up new business ideas. Perhaps this was because though both courses had demonstrated the risks of such self-employment, they had also remained positive and shown the benefits as well. The students on the short course commented on the enthusiastic approach of the tutor and that they met several successful business people during the course. The students on the correspondence course felt that the panel of business people had provided them with encouragement as well as criticism.

There were some suggestions for improvements from the students for both courses. For the short course, they wanted the handouts numbered and fastened together in some way and more comfortable seats. The tutor/manager was aware of these needs and pointed out several other

additions that she would like to make to the course such as the loan of business tapes for students' revision and for students who missed sessions. She would have welcomed a business manual for each student, but she was constrained by a lack of funding. The students put forward several ideas for improving the correspondence course materials, such as more detailed information and case-studies. On both courses, several students expressed a wish for more student interaction as they perceived that as being helpful for their learning. For the short course, perhaps as the students suggested, a ten minute coffee break and the positioning of seats in less formal rows would assist in getting groups together more. As we have already indicated, the providers for the correspondence course have plans for the provision of more student/tutor interaction. Their more serious problem is probably whether or not there is a sufficient market for such a course when there are so many free courses available. Nevertheless, it is obviously important that anyone starting up their own business or already running a small business, should attend such courses before wasting too much of their own or of taxpayers' money. All the students apart from one considered that even though they felt less confident about immediately setting up their own business, they had nevertheless gained something beneficial from attending one of these courses. These gains included a better understanding of the running of businesses in general, obtaining useful course materials for future reference, and developing ideas to follow up such as taking other courses, or doing further market research.

SUMMARY OF VIEWS ON EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHODS

In the three boxes below we attempt to encapsulate the central elements of our findings on teaching methods. The first two cover the perceptions of both students and tutors and are subdivided into the three areas of effectiveness dealt with in Chapter 2: learning about the feasibility of setting up your own business, learning about the world of small business and gaining a sense of purpose in life. We hope that these two tables will generate questions in themselves. However, we have also included a further box designed to stimulate discussion on some issues in planning courses.

BOX 1: ACHIEVEMENT

WHAT DID THE STUDENTS VALUE?	HOW WAS THIS ACHIEVED? (The views of tutors and students)
Learning about the feasibility of setting up one's own small business	
Discovering which elements in a business were viable.	Through giving students practical exercises eg market research, costing of equipment etc. Counselling from tutors and the panel.
Specific/relevant information for each student's business plan.	The provision of individual tuition. Counselling in class. Written comments on assignments. Tutor telephone support. A meeting with a panel of business people.
Self-awareness - finding out whether or not they possess the right personality for being self-employed.	Presentation of case-studies revealing harsher aspects of business world. Through students presenting business ideas to the public during market research.
Learning about the world of small business	
Gaining a sense of realism - the risks, hard work, independence and excitement of setting up a small business.	The tutor providing accounts of her own and others' business experiences. A video showing the experiences of two people setting up a small business. Provision of speakers who have set up a successful business. Course written materials - case-studies.
Discussion of business ideas and the sharing of problems.	Discussion in class of ideas and of market research findings with tutor, speakers and other students. A follow-up party. Immediate telephone response from the tutor.
Identification of sources of help and of information.	Face to face tuition. Provision of speakers on topics such as VAT, insurance and grants. Provision of a panel of business people, eg bank -manager, accountant, small business consultant.
Gaining a sense of purpose in life	
Making vocational plans for the future.	Assisting students to design a business plan.
Something to achieve/work at during a stressful period.	Working out a timetable of activities. The provision of course materials. Returning marked assignments. The panel giving ideas for students to carry out after completion of the course.

BOX 2: CONSTRAINTS

CONSTRAINTS IDENTIFIED BY TUTOR/ STUDENTS	THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONSTRAINTS (The views of tutors and students)
Learning about the feasibility of setting up one's own small business	
Too few opportunities to exchange ideas or to share problems with tutor, other students or business people.	Students feel isolated, particularly in the case of the correspondence course where the students were located all over the country.
Disparity of students' business ideas.	Limits use of interaction among students.
Fear of competition and need for confidentiality.	Some students feel they need to be treated on an individual basis.
Lack of financial backing or ability to provide viable business idea or personal characteristics eg hardworking, willing to take risks.	Loss of interest in continuing the course amongst students lacking any of these.
Materials fail to take account of the differing needs of the students (correspondence course).	Too little information for some students. Too challenging for others.
Learning about the world of small business	
Not hearing enough about other students' business experience.	Students feel isolated, particularly in the case of the correspondence course where the students were located all over the country.
No detailed personalised case-studies (correspondence written materials).	Information lacks realism.
Gaining a sense of purpose in life	
Lack of balance between theory and practice.	Students dropping out.
Difficult for students in prison to carry out.	Loss of interest.
Long prison sentence to complete before able to start a business.	Giving up the course.

BOX 3: FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR THOSE PLANNING COURSES

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR PLANNING

Courses A and B

What kind of balance between theory and practice is envisaged?

Do students need to understand general principles of business as well as developing their own ideas? If so, how is time to be allocated remembering that failure to develop a business idea, or a poor business idea, may lead to students dropping out?

How much encouragement should you give to students with good or bad business ideas if the aim is to get students to learn from their own experience?

Course A

Is the Training Agency giving training providers sufficient forewarning for running such courses?

Do opportunities exist for tutors to exchange information with others involved in the teaching of starting-your-own-business courses?

Are there sufficient guidelines/provision for discussion for funding requirements between the Training Agency and the providers?

Is there sufficient time during courses for social mixing among students?

How do you retain morale/interest among students when attendance drops?

Course B

Are the course materials suited to the range of abilities of the students?

Are the course materials relevant to students with diverse business ideas? Would the inclusion of more case-studies be helpful?

Is there sufficient face to face support for the students?

A student has paid a substantial fee for a provider's course and then discovers at an early stage the business plan is not viable. How can the original materials stimulate new ideas?

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APPENDIX A: SHORT COURSE A: PRIVATE SECTOR PROVIDER WITH FUNDING FROM THE PUBLIC SECTOR

This description is based on our observation of the teaching methods used on seven of the course's nine class sessions.

COURSE ACTIVITIES

The students spent most of their class-time listening to and discussing with the tutor and speakers, business theories, business experiences and business ideas. This teaching was backed up by handouts, blackboard work and pamphlets. The students designed their questionnaires for market research in class, carried out the research in their free-time and reported their findings back to the class.

Session 1: Saturday morning: 4 females; 3 males.

9.30: Introductory procedures : The tutor greeted the students individually and gave them folders and loose handouts. She suggested that they had coffee. Then she went over the course programme, emphasising the importance of market research homework. She told the students that they were free to interrupt her at any time and she encouraged them to help each other. She said her aim was to develop in the students the attitudes of a business person.

10.00: She gave a brief talk about Business Plans. Every so often, she asked the students if they had any questions.

10.15: The students introduced themselves to the class and described their backgrounds and business ideas.

10.25: The tutor related a short talk on Definitions of Entrepreneurs to the information the students had just given her.

10.50: The tutor amusingly filled out the information on a handout entitled Day in the Life of an Entrepreneur. Again she linked this to the students' individual business ideas.

11.15: Coffee break.

11.40 : The tutor and students discussed some case histories of successful and unsuccessful businesses.

12.18: The tutor went through a booklist with the students.

12.45: She reminded the students that soon they would need to do market research for their business ideas.

Session 2: 5 females; 3 males.

18.00: The tutor invited the students to have coffee. Talk on 'Business Frameworks'. The tutor related this to her own business experiences, checking every so often that the students understood.

18.33: Partnerships - the tutor described some case histories to illustrate this. The students gave examples.

18.55: Marketing, and Market Research - the tutor explained to them how to do this.

19.00: The students started designing their market research questionnaires and the tutor fixed dates for them to report back their findings to the rest of the class.

19.15: The tutor went over the marketing handout.

19.25: Students continued designing their questionnaires. The tutor suggested that they had some coffee and said that they were welcome to leave when they were satisfied with their questionnaires.

Session 3: 4 females; 3 males.

18.00: Talk and discussion on Advertising.

18.15: Marketing and Market Research - discussion on this and the design of the students' questionnaires.

19.00: The tutor involved the class in designing an advertisement for one student's small business.

19.05: Coffee break - the tutor continued talking informally about the business world.

19.15: The tutor got the students to read out their questionnaires and to comment on each other's work.

20.00: Revision on the legal set up. The tutor asked the students what sort of legal set up they would like for themselves.

Session 4: (not observed)
18.00 - 20.00: Speaker from a grant agency on Pricing and Costing.

Session 5: (not observed)
19.00 - 20.00: Speaker on Sales Forecasting and Preparing a Business Plan.

Session 6: 3 females; 3 males.
18.00: Two speakers who have successfully set up a small business, discussed the business world with the students and showed them their products. The tutor sometimes suggested that the speakers told the students about certain aspects, for instance what had happened that had been unexpected in their business experiences. The speakers asked the students about their own business ideas.

20.10: One student reported on his market research findings. One student wished to discuss press releases so the tutor did that.

Session 7: 3 females; 3 males.
18.00: Speaker on VAT. He supplied the students with more than 15 leaflets.

19.40: Talk from tutor on Advertising and Promoting.

Session 8: 3 females; 1 male.
18.00: Talk from tutor on Keeping Books and Accounting. Discussion with students.

19.05: Three students reported back to the class their market research findings.

19.55: Business plans - a cash flow chart. Discussion on this and the students started designing a chart for their business plans. The tutor went round checking these.

Session 9: Saturday morning, 1 female; 1 male.
9.30 - 9.55: Discussion on Professional Indemnity.

9.55: Action Plans for the students. The tutor suggested what one student should do next.

10.00: Speaker on Insurance talked to the students about his own experiences in the business world and answered their questions.

11.16: The second student's action plan was discussed. Then loans were discussed.

12.30: The class was dismissed after the tutor had thanked the speaker. The ending was somewhat abrupt in that the tutor did not remind the students about other courses or the follow-up party.

Individual Tuition

This brief description of the course's provision of individual tuition for students is based on the observation of two such meetings. The meetings lasted one hour. If the student's business idea seemed feasible, the tutor spent the time suggesting further market research and planning out parts of a business plan, such as a cash flow chart. If the student's business idea did not seem feasible, the tutor tried to help the student find a different idea. Students were entitled to a second hour of such tuition after the completion of the course.

APPENDIX B: DISTANCE LEARNING COURSE B: PUBLIC SECTOR PROVIDER

This description is based on a perusal of course materials and on our discussions with the tutor, course organiser and students. We were unable to observe the self-study processes and the tutor's teaching in the form of telephone tuition and written comments.

COURSE ACTIVITIES

Most of the students' time was spent in self-study - reading the course materials and carrying out various activities. Their written answers to the latter served as a draft for their individual business plans for presenting to a panel of business people.

A chronological description of course activities

The course can take between two and nine months to complete. Each student worked out an individual timetable with the tutor. This included reading the course materials and carrying out those activities which the tutor perceived as being helpful for the student's business plan. The majority of the activities were directly related to the student's own business. The answers were sent to the tutor for written comment. We have selected four of these 35 activities to give a flavour of the course. The first activity, which we have described below, was the opening one for the students.

1) The students were given a list of different types of risks and had to assess the extent to which they might affect the success of their own business. For instance, was the market for the service/ product growing, stable or declining? If the students discovered at the end of this activity that the business was appearing mostly in the high risk category, they were asked to reconsider their business idea.

2) The students had three tasks. Firstly, they were to find out possible competitors for their business. Secondly, they had to try to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these competing businesses. Finally, in their own business plans, they had to consider how to match the competitors' strengths and to take advantage of their weaknesses.

3) The students were to make a list of the materials which they believed would be necessary to have at the start of a business, six months later and twelve months after and then to work out the costs.

4) In a previous activity, the students had practised doing a break-even graph and then they were asked to do that with the projected income statement of their own business.

Individual assessment by the panel of experts

This brief description of the procedures of the meeting with the panel is based on the observation of two of its meetings. These took place two months after the students had completed the course and had sent a business plan for assessment to the provider. For half an hour before the student joined the panel, the three members, an accountant, a banker and a small business consultant, discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the student's business plan. Then they went through the plan with the student, pointing out any errors and areas which needed further investigation. After an hour of discussion with the student, the panel filled in an assessment sheet. Later the student received a course completion certificate and the panel's written comments.